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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 000876

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/29/2039  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IS](#) [IR](#) [AR](#)  
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: ISRAELI FM VISITS ARGENTINA AND  
EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER RISING IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN REGION

Classified By: CDA Alexander A. Featherstone for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In what the Israeli Foreign Ministry called an effort to counter "Iran's heightened activity in South America," Israeli FM Avigdor Lieberman visited Argentina July 23-26 during the first trip to South America by an Israeli FM in over two decades. Argentina was the second stop on Lieberman's ten-day visit to Latin America, with stops in Brazil, Peru and Colombia. According to local newspapers, President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) did not meet with Lieberman "to distance herself from the ultranationalist politician." (She also was absent from Argentina on July 24 to participate in the Mercosur Summit in Paraguay.) Lieberman met separately with Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana and CFK's Chief of Staff Anibal Fernandez reportedly to raise the Israeli government's concerns that Venezuela was facilitating Iran's growing influence in Latin America. He also relayed Israeli President Shimon Peres' intention to visit Argentina in November.

¶2. (C) Lieberman paid homage to the victims of the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy and the 1994 bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association (AMIA). He met with AMIA special prosecutor Alberto Nisman and encouraged him to push INTERPOL to help capture former Iranian officials implicated in the bombing. In an effort to promote greater economic ties, Lieberman, who was accompanied by a trade delegation, met with Buenos Aires Provincial Governor Daniel Scioli, Buenos Aires City Mayor Mauricio Macri and leaders of the Argentine Industrial Association. He also met with members of the Israeli Friendship Congressional Caucus. The Foreign Minister's visit received positive press coverage and some protests from local left-wing groups and social organizations. End Summary.

Israeli FM Visit is First in 23 Years...

¶3. (C) Israeli Minister of Foreign Relations Avigdor Lieberman visited Argentina July 23-26 in the first trip in 23 years by an Israeli FM to South America. According to largest-circulation daily "Clarín," the visit was part of a diplomatic offensive to respond to Iran's growing involvement in the region, including the tri-border area that Argentina shares with Brazil and Paraguay. Argentine media characterized Lieberman and his party, Yisrael Beiteinu ("Israel is our Home"), as right-wing nationalists. Lieberman was accompanied by 20 business leaders from the communication, high tech, and agriculture sectors.

...But CFK Meeting not on the Agenda

¶4. (C) Argentina was the second stop in Lieberman's ten-day trip to South America, which includes Brazil, Peru and Colombia. Although Lieberman met with Brazilian President Lula and was scheduled to meet with Presidents Garcia in Peru and Uribe in Colombia, President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) did not receive him. She was absent from Argentina for one day of his visit in order to attend the July 24 Mercosur summit in Paraguay. Pro-government and left-of-center daily "Pagina 12" speculated that CFK avoided meeting Lieberman "to distance herself from the ultranationalist politician" with whom she differs on the Palestine issue. An MFA source confirmed that CFK had made a deliberate decision not to meet Lieberman. In explaining the GOA's position, pro-government "Pagina 12" stated that "the idea is to maintain balance, not favor one side over another, and respect the historically good relations enjoyed by our two countries." An Israeli Embassy contact told us the visit went better than expected, although it was disappointing that CFK was the only president who did not receive Lieberman on this four-nation trip.

#### Lieberman Raises Concerns about Iran and Venezuela

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¶5. (SBU) On July 23, Argentine Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana received FM Lieberman, Daniel Gazit, the Israeli Ambassador to Argentina and the Israeli Foreign Ministry's Director General for Latin American Affairs Dorit Shavit. During the meeting, Lieberman relayed President Shimon Peres' intention to visit Argentina in November. An MFA source confirmed that Lieberman focused on his concerns that Venezuela is

facilitating Iranian activity in Latin America and that the GOI was worried about ongoing Iranian activity in the tri-border area. The press also said that Lieberman asked the GOA for quick ratification of the free trade agreement between Israel and Mercosur.

¶6. (SBU) According to "Pagina 12," Taiana assured Lieberman that Argentina does not have strong relations with Iran. He pointed out that at the UN the GOA has called on Iran to cooperate in the investigation of the 1994 bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association (AMIA). Taiana also reportedly told Lieberman that Argentina differed with Israel on the Palestine situation and expressed concern about Israel's late 2008 military incursion in the Gaza strip. After the meeting, the MFA issued a press release saying that Taiana and Lieberman had agreed to move forward with preparations for Peres' visit in November.

¶7. (SBU) According to press reports, Lieberman raised the same issues during his 40-minute meeting with CFK's Chief of Cabinet Anibal Fernandez on July 24. During the meeting, Lieberman reportedly told Cabinet Chief Fernandez that it had been too long since an Israeli FM had visited the region, but "now, we are going to be proactive toward South America. Unfortunately, the Iranians are ahead of us and that is why we want to develop economic relations with the region."

#### Press Offensive

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¶8. (SBU) In a lengthy, full-page interview with newspaper-of-record "La Nacion," FM Lieberman said the purpose of his trip was three-fold: 1) to recognize the historically strong ties between Israel and South America, particularly with Argentina, home to the region's largest Jewish community; 2) to transmit a message of support to all of the region's Jewish communities; and 3) to renew Israel's ties with the region in the face of Iranian encroachment. An Israeli Embassy contact considered the prominent "La Nacion" interview one of the major accomplishments of the visit. Lieberman's description of Iran as "a demented regime (that is) very dangerous" became the banner headline for the article. Lieberman questioned Iran's rationale that its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes, and pointed out that Iran has a more than ample oil supply to meet its

energy needs. (Note: In other comments to the press, he warned that Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons would spark an arms race in the Middle East.) Making implicitly clear that he viewed Venezuela as a stalking horse for Iran in the region, he said that Venezuelan President "(Hugo) Chavez's influence on other countries in the region sends a bad signal and strengthens the extremists." Israeli MFA Director General of Latin American Affairs Dorit Shavit told local press that Venezuela was providing false documents to Iranians to help facilitate Iranian travel throughout South America.

#### Solidarity with the Argentine Jewish Community

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¶9. (C) On July 24, Lieberman paid his respects to the victims of both the 1992 Israeli Embassy bombing that killed 29 persons and the 1994 AMIA center bombing that killed 85 persons and injured hundreds more, visiting both sites. During the visit to the AMIA, he met with leaders of the Jewish community as well as friends and family of the AMIA victims. Lieberman also met with AMIA special prosecutor Alberto Nisman, whom he encouraged to continue pressing for the capture of former Iranian officials who have been indicted in the AMIA case. Israeli Ambassador to Argentina Daniel Gazit in Buenos Aires told "La Nacion" that Lieberman and Nisman also discussed the possibility of declaring the AMIA attack a crime against humanity. Two Jewish community leaders told post that they thought Lieberman's visit had been mostly positive in focusing GOA attention on shared concerns about Iranian support for terrorist activity. One of the leaders said Lieberman's visit had generated less controversy in Argentina than anticipated (a view that was privately echoed to us by an MFA source), although another Jewish leader noted the appearance around Buenos Aires of posters comparing Lieberman to Hitler and otherwise "inciting hatred."

#### Strengthening Economic Ties

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¶10. (SBU) Lieberman also used his visit to promote stronger economic and commercial ties between the two countries. On July 23, Lieberman, alongside Buenos Aires province Governor Daniel Scioli, addressed a seminar of the Argentine Industrial Association (UIA), where he announced an Israeli investment of 120 million pesos (approximately USD 32 million) in a water plant in La Plata, the capital city of Buenos Aires province. He described Israeli-Argentine trade relations of USD 300 million as "not sufficient," saying there is room to expand in the technology, security equipment, medical, and agriculture sectors. According to Ambassador Gazit, Lieberman also discussed expanded technical and scientific cooperation as well as possible investment in Buenos Aires City during a July 24 meeting with Buenos Aires City Mayor Mauricio Macri.

#### Anti-Zionist Groups Protest Visit

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¶11. (C) The Foreign Minister's visit received some criticism from local left-wing groups and social organizations. On July 23, local anti-Zionist groups and leftist groups, including the often violent Quebracho group, demonstrated outside the Argentine Industrial Association's headquarters to protest the commercial aspects of the visit. The group then marched to the Israeli Embassy and concluded their protest outside the Argentine Foreign Ministry, according to press reports. During the protest, the head of Argentine Palestinian Entities read a document denouncing "the visit of this big idiot, a recognized racist and a practicing xenophobe." Our MFA source noted that there was no major public criticism of the Lieberman visit or how the GOA received him, despite the controversy he had generated elsewhere. A Jewish community leader told us he thought the visit had no negative public repercussions.

Comment

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¶12. (C) The GOA's reception of Lieberman, on the surface, appeared cordial but distant. Given CFK's efforts to maintain strong and positive relations with Argentina's Jewish community, it may seem remarkable that she chose not to meet with Lieberman, unlike her counterparts in Brazil, Peru, and Colombia. In its approach to Israel and the Middle East conflict, however, the GOA has long sought to maintain balance between Israel and the Arab world, largely because it does not wish to antagonize either its large Jewish or Muslim populations.

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